

Feminism, Surveillance, and Patriarchal Technologies in Margaret Atwood's *The Testaments*: A Feminist Cultural Critique

Assistant Professor Dr Raed Nafea Farhan

General Directorate of Education in Al-Anbar, Ministry of Education, Iraq

Keywords— *Feminism, Technofeminism, Surveillance, Biopolitics, Margaret Atwood.*

Received: 07 Jan 2025;

Received in revised form: 04 Feb 2026;

Accepted: 09 Feb 2026,

Published on: 14 Feb 2026

©2026 The Author(s). Published by
TheShillonga. This is an open-access article
under the CC BY license
(<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>)



Abstract— In a dystopian theocracy, *The Testaments* (2019) by Margaret Atwood is a follow-up to *The Handmaid Tale*. There has been little research on how patriarchal technologies like rituals, uniforms, registries, and medico-legal protocols are the socio-technical structures that govern biopolitics. This gap frames the present study, which seeks to analyze how Atwood depicts patriarchal technologies and to examine what forms of feminist agency emerge from within these systems. The study has a qualitative, interpretive methodology that relies on a close reading of *The Testaments*. Data collection is based on the primary text and peer-reviewed articles. Its analysis is informed by theory-based thematic coding that corresponds to the feminist technoscience and cyborg feminism developed by Haraway as well as panopticism and his concept of biopolitics (1978). Results indicate that patriarchal technologies in Gilead punish subjects with objects of daily life, but that the same infrastructures are ironically redesigned to become instruments of rebellion, especially in the hands of Aunt Lydia, Agnes, and Nicole. The study adds an infrastructural feminist reading that redefines artefacts as technologies of governance, to add value to Atwood scholarship and to feminist theory and surveillance studies as a whole. The study suggests that more comparative work should be done on the novel in relation to other contemporary novels. By emphasizing the multidisciplinary nature in which domination and resistance are co-produced, the study highlights the importance of literature in theorizing gender, technology, and power.

I. INTRODUCTION

The Testaments by Margaret Atwood (2019) is a follow-up to the Gileadean imaginary that runs the institutions of authoritarian control through women's bodies and also dramatizes the development of feminist agency within these structures. The sequel, *The Handmaid Tale*, sees fifteen years of the events, and through it, we see the complexity of the ways of keeping power. These include standardized clothing and catechisms, curricula for girls and Aunts, genealogical records and dossiers, and medico-legal protocols that measure and regulate reproduction (Atwood, 2019). Read as a nexus of feminist technoscience, surveillance theory, and biopolitics, *The Testaments* emerges as a biased point of view in exploring how the encodings of patriarchal authority are encoded in technologies (in the broad sense of the term, to include procedures, texts, and material artefacts), and how feminist counter-practices can negotiate, subvert, or reroute those

encodings (Wajcman, 2004; Haraway; Foucault, 1977; 1978).

While *The Testaments* has received significant contributions to feminist criticism, ethical/theological issues, sequelization, or character rehabilitation have been prefigured elsewhere, leaving the technofeminist and surveillance/biopolitical infrastructures of the novel underspecified. This study fills in that gap by theorizing patriarchal technologies- rituals, uniforms, registries, and medico-legal protocols- as purposeful instruments of visibility, normalization, and reproductive governance. Within the framework of feminist technoscience and Foucauldian surveillance, one can understand reading these devices in the novel because it envisions gendered subjection and conditions of resistance (Foucault, 1977; Foucault, 1978; Wajcman, 2004; Lyon, 2007).

The scope is limited to a qualitative, interpretive close reading of *The Testaments* (2019), concentrating on the

narrative voices of Aunt Lydia, Agnes, and Nicole as the place where the patriarchal technologies can be written and countered. Methodologically, the study incorporates feminist technoscience (Wajcman, 2004; Haraway, 2013), surveillance theory (Foucault, 1977; Lyon, 2007), and biopolitics (Foucault, 1978; Walby, 1990) as a way of interpreting how technologies of control and forms of agency are brought into being. Relevant comparisons to the more expansive oeuvre of Atwood are resorted to only where they help to shed light on mechanisms unique to this novel (Howells, 2021/2023).

Within this frame, the study pursues two aims and is guided by one research question. First, it theorizes the novel's depiction of patriarchal technologies, disciplinary schooling for girls and Aunts, ritualized dress and speech acts, genealogical record-keeping, fertility monitoring, and marriage/kinship contracts as instruments that render subjects legible and comparable, and that normalize conduct through ranking, examination, and ritual repetition. Second, it clarifies the ways of feminist agency which occur inside and outside of these tools, especially focusing on the way that Aunt Lydia is a grand manipulator and the generational relations between Agnes and Nicole. Accordingly, it asks: *How does Atwood's The Testaments depict patriarchal technologies and surveillance as tools of control over women's bodies, and what forms of feminist resistance emerge against them?*

Feminist technoscience serves to explain why these artefacts cannot be said to be neutral: technologies are historically produced in a gendered relation of power and, therefore, tend to reproduce androcentric interests when put to feminist use (Farhan, 2023; Wajcman, 2004). This cyborg feminism by Haraway also undermines the binary logics that support patriarchal power, all the constructions of nature/culture, human/machine, male/female, the futuristic embodiment of hybridity, and the praxis of coalitionary is also preempted (Farhan, 2024; Haraway, 1991). Technological mediation is applied to the subjects of Gilead in *The Testaments* (costume, curriculum, paperwork, medical instrumentation), but, conversely, provides affordances to counter-use: smuggling documents, reworking archives, performing choreographed revelations. This two-fold valence can be understood as a fundamental fact of feminist science and technology studies: domination and agency are produced together and through infrastructures (Wajcman, 2004; Banet-Weiser, Gill, and Rottenberg, 2019).

At the same time, surveillance studies and Foucauldian theory define the process of manufacturability and routinization of visibility. Discipline and Punish characterizes the panopticism as a mode in which visibility

is a trap and the interiorisation of the visibility creates docile bodies (Foucault, 1977). In *The Testaments*, the principles of panopticism are transformed into the practices of intimate government in ceremonial display, in the form of public shame (orchestrated confessions) and in the form of bureaucratic registers (files, genealogies, witness testimonies), as well as the practices of tutelage. It is this understanding of modern surveillance as a part of daily institutions, not an event of spectacular policing, that allows us to read the catechetical classrooms of Gilead and the rules of the Ardua Hall procedures as usual, systemic surveillance that is both monitored and modelled by (Lyon, 2007). More importantly, recent Atwood scholarship highlights that gendered surveillance can also work by other means, such as coercion, but also through affective and narrative capture: the cultivation of shame, piety, and obligation through the means of stories, liturgy, and pedagogical scripts (Howells, 2021/2023; Weiss, 2023; Keck, 2022).

Lastly, there is a biopolitical lens, which explains why the fulcrums of power in the novel are kinship and reproductive capacity. The contemporary power in the formulation of Foucault assumes some control over life whereby populations are governed in the form of health, sexuality, and birth (Foucault, 1978). This administration provided by the Testaments dramatizes through fertility measurements, marriage contracts, and genealogical policing, all of which reproduce what Walby has referred to as the institutional organization of patriarchy in the household, state, and culture (Walby, 1990). The focus of Atwood on paperwork, laws, handbooks, and archival testimonies makes biopolitics readable as a textual regime: life is administered by scripts that delineate legitimacy, purity, and kinship. An additional inflection is posthuman ethics with its emphasis on the co-constitutivity of bodies, tools, spaces, and media and its urging of an analysis beyond humanist voluntarism (Braidotti, 2013).

The confessional archive of Aunt Lydia is iconic on the level of narrative technique. It is created under the circumstances of surveillance and fear, but it is specifically an archive--indexed, stored, transmissible--that allows her to plot insurgency. The patriarchal rule is also based on the same documentary infrastructures that provide material to destabilize it once reconfigured by a counter-user (Atwood, 2019). The pedagogy of normalization is enforced in Agnes' schooling, complete with catechisms and prescriptive exempla, and the transnational itinerary of Nicole reflects the travelling of governance in datafied forms, with reference to the behavioural capture of surveillance capitalism (Zuboff, 2019). The three narrations collectively perform a comparative anatomy of gendered control: a ritualized form of inside that sacralizes

visibility and purity, and a securitized form of outside that digitalizes traceability, different modalities that intersect at the same telos of reproductive government (Lyon, 2007; Zuboff, 2019).

This interdisciplinary action is not heuristic only, but corresponds to the representational logic of the novel. The dress/gesture choreography (uniforms, veils, badges) is an externalizing technology of their hierarchies, an exteriorization of bodies, which can be scanned with a glance. Catechetical voice is a software of self, repeating scripts to the point that they ossify into virtue or shame. Dossiers/Registries are databases to be interrogated and cross-referenced; their claim to truth legitimizes acts on life and lineage. Nevertheless, how these systems may be subverted is also presented in *The Testaments*: selective disclosure, encryption via euphemism, controlled leaks, and counter-archiving carve out tactical spaces of agency. In these regards, the novel practices what could be termed infrastructural literacy, which entails reading, re-directing, and re-writing the structures of life- a feminist practice that is no less about technique than it is about ethics (Banet-Weiser et al., 2019; Gill, 2007). The contribution of the present article is therefore twofold. Substantively, it re-contextualizes *The Testaments* as a work about patriarchal technologies and gendered surveillance, outlining the artefacts and routines of control as practiced and normalized, and outlining the counter-uses of agency by the subject. It shows the payoff to reading speculative fiction, methodologically, through lenses of integrated socio-technical theory-technofeminism, surveillance studies, and biopolitics to reconcile literary form with socio-technical structures. To a journal focused on literature-and-science dialogues, the case is instructive: Atwood in the novel does not simply represent domination; it presents a prototype of how domination is produced infrastructurally and how resistance may be modelled within (Farhan, 2025; Howells, 2021/2023)

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

With the publication of *The Testaments* (2019) by Margaret Atwood, scholarly interest has grown exponentially since the book was released, and reviewers have focused on the themes of resistance, complicity, morality and continuity as they relate to *The Handmaid Tale*. Even though the arguments provide a few useful hints about the character of the dystopian sequel by Atwood, the critical community remains divided in terms of its attitude to technological, disciplinary and biopolitical dimensions of the novel. Literature on feminist theory, technofeminism, surveillance studies, and biopolitics can

provide necessary conceptual resources on how patriarchal power is written in the material and institutional sense, but these strands are frequently used separately. *The Testaments* thus needs to be placed in higher critical circles, and one should critically examine how the novel extends and questions the current feminist analyses of dystopian domination. In this section, the author consolidates the significant contributions in the field of feminist technoscience, surveillance theory, and biopolitical analysis and defines the research gap that inspired the current research.

2.1. Feminism and Technofeminism

The best place to enter into Atwood's *The Testaments* is, perhaps, the technofeminist argument that technologies cannot be neutral, and are always constructed in gendered relations of power. Wajcman (2004) stresses that the artefacts and institutional routines cement the patriarchal priorities and establish the male authority within the social practice. This view reorients the seemingly banal artefacts of Gilead, such as uniforms, catechisms, genealogical registries, and handbooks, as engineered socio-technical systems to control bodies and normalize behavior (Farhan, 2025).

This is further destabilized in the Cyborg Manifesto (1991) by Haraway, as there is a breakdown of binarism, including male/female or human/machine. She claims that hybrid embodiment creates the possibilities of coalition and opposition (pp. 149-181). Aunt Lydia of the novel presents this paradox: she is the master enforcer of the bureaucratic technologies of Gilead, yet she is also the master in weaponizing archival documents to sabotage the system. The archive is not only a means of domination but also a subversion, and this exemplifies the argument of Haraway that technologies are full of feminist repurposing.

In *Theorizing Patriarchy* (1990), Walby brings out the institutional extension of patriarchal power within the household, state, and religion. This echoes the description of rituals and curricula as discussed by Atwood, in which uniforms and prescribed scripts of Aunts perform the role of authority but package that authority in the veil of moral legitimacy. In the same vein, feminist cultural theorists like Gill (2007) or Banet-Weiser, Gill, and Rottenberg (2019) emphasize the reproduction of normative femininity as repetitive cultural scripting, which is due to indoctrination into purity and obedience that Agnes experiences (Farhan, 2024; Farhan, 2023).

Collectively, these views help to understand that *The Testaments* does not view artefacts as a background. Still, as technologies of patriarchy that have a two-pronged valence: they create unity and surveillance, but can also be reused in resistance through clever renegotiation.

2.2. Surveillance and Disciplinary Power

The concept of disciplinary power, as described by Foucault, is considered one of the main frames for reading *The Testaments*. Foucault (1977) points out in *Discipline and Punish* that institutions in modern days maintain order not by using brute force but by creating visibility, scrutiny, and normalization. The Panopticon principle illustrates the fact that visibility is a trap: subjects internalize surveillance and become self-regulating even when they are not being directly coerced. The reasoning in Atwood's Gilead is evident in ordinary rituals: in the form of mass shaming, as in the ritual confessions, and catechetical exercises, as panoptic theatres.

David Lyon (2007) builds on this model by demonstrating that surveillance has become institutionalized in ordinary organizations like schools, welfare, and religious organizations. This view throws light on the training of Aunts at the Ardua Hall, where constant monitoring and grading are used to create obedient members. Surveillance is not only a material in Gilead, but in a text: files, genealogical records and witness statements are bureaucratized sources of tabulating and correcting identities. These articles ensure that the government never forgets the contribution of women, their sexual background, and their relations with families.

Recent work on Atwood substantiates the view that her dystopias dramatize the way gendered surveillance naturalizes inequality. The ritual aspect of surveillance, highlighted by *The Cambridge Companion to Atwood* (Howells and York, 2023), refers to the use of liturgies and dress codes as cultural technologies of watching. Likewise, the *Law, Surveillance and the Humanities* (2023) Edinburgh volume compiles the role of Atwood in the comprehension of surveillance as a non-state violence but as a form of intimate discipline that is mediated through narrative and performance.

In this respect, *The Testaments* describes surveillance as a complex activity: visual, bureaucratic, and affective. It renders compliant subjects out of visibility and shame, yet also cracks open the system. The secret archive of Aunt Lydia shows that even surveillance systems can be turned against us and yield an asset of resistance, not submission.

2.3. Biopolitics and Patriarchal Technologies

The notion of biopolitics given by Foucault is another critical framework through which one can interpret *The Testaments*. In the history of sexuality, Foucault (1978) describes how modern power acquires control of life and how it handles health, sexuality, and reproduction. States not only exercise sovereignty through death or punishment, but they also control populations and construct fertility and legitimacy. Atwood plays out this

procedure in Gilead with the help of genealogical registries, marriage agreements, fertility tests, and medicalized rituals, which institutionalize reproductive regulation. These ritualized and bureaucratized practices relegate the life of women to both biological and social roles so that the reproduction process is closely supervised and politicized.

Theorizing Patriarchy by Sylvia Walby (1990) is the complement of this reading, emphasizing the functioning of patriarchal control at the levels of an interlocking system, i.e., the household, religion, and state. In *The Testaments*, all these spheres cooperate to gain control over the bodies of women. The theocratic power approves sanctions of reproductive laws, the household approves kinship rules, and the bureaucracies monitor genealogical purity. They are all connected in an apparatus of multilayered patriarchal technologies, which normalize inequality.

Modern scholarship gives an additional echo. The *Posthuman* (2013) by Braidotti speaks to the fact that bodies are inseparable technologies and environments, which in turn enables the reproductive rituals practiced by Gilead to be viewed in a larger context of posthumanism. In *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism* (2019), Zuboff illustrates how contemporary societies capitalize on reproductive and behavioral information, a logic reflected in Nicole's plot, who is outside Gilead, where identity is securitized and tracked through cross-border documents. Comparing ritualized reproduction within Gilead to data-driven monitoring within the context of the novel, Atwood depicts how patriarchal technologies are scaled to fit different situations even as they all strive to achieve the same telos: domination of life.

Finally, *The Testaments* shows that in Gilead, it is impossible to separate the biopolitics of the country and its patriarchal technologies. Reproductive governance, kinship regulation, and medico-legal documentation converge to create obedient subjects. Yet, these same structures could be reinvested in changing the balance of power between the sexes, as the archive of Aunt Lydia demonstrates.

2.4. Research Gap and Positioning

Although the scholarship on *The Testaments* has enhanced the feminist analysis of *The Testaments*, it has mainly focused on the issues of morality, complicity, and redemption. An example is Josefsson (2020), who points out the moral agency of Aunt Lydia as a complicated entity, and Keck (2022) to the tension between women's resistance and compliance with the systems of patriarchy. Similarly, Weiss (2023) is concerned with the gender performance of Lydia, demonstrating how her subversion

in the form of her publicity and interactions and her subversion in the form of her privacy are co-produced. These analyses provide valuable information yet tend to separate ethical and affective aspects without questioning infrastructural processes that perpetuate the regime of Gilead.

The question that still needs to be addressed is how the novel conceptualizes patriarchal technologies, rituals, uniforms, genealogical registries, handbooks, and medico-legal protocols as structured mechanisms of surveillance and biopolitical regulation. Although technofeminism, surveillance studies, and biopolitics have been applied separately to dystopian texts, few analyses combine these approaches to demonstrate how *The Testaments* transforms technologies into both means of control and a tool of defiance.

This article is at that crossroads. It uses syntheses of Wajcman technofeminism, Foucault surveillance and biopolitics theories, and Walby's model of institutional patriarchy to create an infrastructural feminist reading of *The Testaments*. The method also adds to the body of Atwood scholarship by redefining the role of ordinary artefacts not as the narrative context but as technologies of governance, as well as explaining how feminist agency can be constructed within the same systems that impose control.

III. METHODOLOGY

In this study, the qualitative interpretive design is employed, namely, close textual reading of the novel *The Testaments* by Margaret Atwood (2019). A qualitative research design best fits the situation since the research question is descriptive: the researcher would like to know how and why the novel portrays and challenges the patriarchal technologies and surveillance system. Literary criticism is preoccupied with the creation of meaning, as opposed to statistical generalization, and therefore it needs interpretive as opposed to quantitative methods (Eagleton 2008). Likewise, Denzin and Lincoln (2018) confirm that qualitative research is most appropriate to address questions on culture, representation, and power relations. This is why the design of the study was chosen as a close reading, which has long been considered the most crucial methodology of literary studies.

The scope of the research is limited to *The Testaments*, while references to *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985) are made only when necessary for contextualization. By concentrating on one text, one can get a lot of depth in the analysis, which is better compared to a more general yet superficial overview of the oeuvre of Atwood. According to Barry (2017), to effectively analyze literature, one must

reduce the scope of the study to be able to apply various theoretical perspectives more specifically (p. 9). In addition, *The Testaments* provides more detailed descriptions of bureaucratic, institutional, and technological domination than its predecessor, and it is specifically appropriate to an infrastructural feminist analysis (Howells and York, 2023). The choice to limit scope to the consideration of a single major novel will hence be based on methodological considerations as well as the sheer richness of the text in theme.

The theoretical framework has three strands, namely: technofeminism, surveillance studies, and biopolitics. The idea that technologies are gendered and often recreate the priorities of patriarchy (Wajcman, *TechnoFeminism*, 2004) may be considered a smart one. This directly addresses how Atwood addresses the technology of gendered power, which is artefacts such as uniforms, catechisms, and genealogical registries. Foucault published *Discipline and Punish* (1977) and *The History of Sexuality* (1978), which can be used to study surveillance and reproductive governance; according to his theory of visibility as a trap (1977, p. 200), Gilead can control its subjects by keeping an eye on them. Lyon (2007) further extends this and points out that surveillance does not only exist in prisons or states but in schools, religious rituals, and day-to-day activities, which are the very institutions that structure Gilead. Finally, *Theorizing Patriarchy* (1990) by Walby provides an example of a model of patriarchy as the system of the household, religion, and state, and Braidotti (2013) is devoted to posthuman embodiment where subjectivity is produced in collaboration with bodies and technologies. The overlap of these structures is provided by the fact that they provide light as to why the novel depicts artefacts as a kind of patriarchal technologies that govern behaviour and procreation.

In terms of data collection, the primary source is the full text of *The Testaments* (2019). All chapters were examined, with particular focus on scenes involving ritual discipline, genealogical control, and archival documentation. The secondary data includes scholarly monographs and peer-reviewed journal articles on Atwood, technofeminism, surveillance, and biopolitics. The sources were selected to provide intellectual rigour. To that end, sources were searched among the reputable publishers (Cambridge University Press, Routledge, and Polity), the journals (*Feminist Theory* and the *Journal of Literary Studies*). Creswell and Creswell (2018) emphasize a crucial role of purposeful sampling in qualitative research, i.e., the need to select data sources that are directly related to the research question. In line with this advice, only those studies that touched on gender, technology, surveillance, or dystopias of Atwood were

retained. Another criterion was recency: not less than 80 per cent of secondary sources are not older than five years (2019-2023), which is also in accordance with the current requirements of literature-based research.

The data analysis followed a theory-driven thematic approach. Textual episodes have been deductively coded into three categories based on the theoretical framework: (1) patriarchal technologies, (2) surveillance practices, and (3) reproductive governance. To illustrate, the aunt's uniforms and catechisms were examined through the lens of Wajcman's technofeminism, Foucault's panopticism, and biopolitical theory's genealogical registries. Ryan and Bernard (2003) suggest such a deductive form of coding as a method of connecting textual material to existing theoretical categories. Meanwhile, the analysis remained open to inductive insights, as passages in the novel that indicated unelucidated themes, such as the emotional ambivalence of complicity, became part of the interpretation. Such an adaptable approach makes sure that theory does not dictate but only informs the analysis, which is in line with the best principles of qualitative research (Denzin and Lincoln, 2018).

Finally, the ethical dimension of the methodology lies in its treatment of texts and sources. Even though there were no human subjects involved, the intellectual responsibility presupposes the need to refer to the sources and not to rely heavily on one theoretical framework. Haraway (1991) also reminds scholars that knowledge is all situated and that methodological pluralism can serve to avert the imposition of a one, all-encompassing interpretation. The methodology combines feminist technoscience, surveillance theory, and biopolitics, thereby resisting the reductive readings often produced by such approaches to methods and capturing the interdisciplinary ethos of literary studies and feminist theory alike.

To sum up, the methodological decisions of the present work are reasonable throughout. The qualitative design is justified by the fact that in the case of literary criticism, interpretive analysis plays a key role (Eagleton, 2008). This is intentionally limited to *The Testaments* so that it can be deepened (Barry, 2017). Exposure to the novel is based on the theoretical frameworks that explicitly shed light on the patriarchal technologies portrayed in the novel (Wajcman, 2004; Foucault, 1977, 1978; Lyon, 2007; Walby, 1990). The primary and secondary data gathered are based on purposeful sampling, as described in Creswell and Creswell's (2018) principle, and the analytical process aligns with Ryan and Bernard's (2003) recommendations for coding and developing themes. Together, these decisions guarantee the rigorous methodology, which is

theoretically based and consistent with the research question.

IV. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis of *The Testaments* helps to establish that the narrative of the author is not confined to the dystopian realm of *The Handmaid Tale*, as the story can be read in many layers in terms of how patriarchal power operates through technological, surveillance, and reproductive control systems. The findings reveal that apparently humane artefacts (uniforms, catechisms, registries and rituals) in fact are complexly made technologies of patriarchy that regulate behaviour, disciplinary agencies, as well as maintain the social order. At the same time, the novel indicates that the same infrastructures can be transformed into a weapon of resistance, in particular, when held by such characters as Aunt Lydia, Agnes, and Nicole. This duality points out the main thesis of the study: equal systems of control, domination, and agency are co-produced. To untangle this dynamic, the discussion is organized into three subsections that are closely connected, namely, feminist and technofeminist, surveillance and disciplinary power, and biopolitics and patriarchal technologies. It also ends with a conclusion that contemplates the significance of this paper and the objectives of the research.

4.1 Feminism and Technofeminist Perspectives

The Testaments of Atwood is a play that dramatizes the operation of apparently banal artefacts, such as uniforms, catechisms, genealogical records, and ritualized hymns, as technologies used to control the lives of women by patriarchs. The hidden testimony of Aunt Lydia highlights this contradiction. She writes, "*Writing is in itself an act of defiance*" (Atwood, 2019, p. 45). The bureaucratic keeping of records, which is meant to centralize the authority of the state, goes back-to-front as a form of resistance when it is turned into a subversive activity. As Wajcman (2004) contends, technologies are historically gendered and reproduce patriarchal hierarchies (pp. 1-2, 48-50). This assertion is supported in the novel by Atwood, who explains how the artefacts of everyday life are coded with power.

In the novel, uniforms, in turn, bring hierarchy out. Aunt Lydia notes that "*The beige dress...made us look as if we were part of the stonework*" (Atwood, 2019, p. 72). Clothing in this case is a socio-technical apparatus, which indicates authority, forces conformity, and enables visibility. Haraway (1991), *Cyborg Manifesto* breaks the male/female and human/machine dichotomy and suggests that hybrid embodiments can produce resistance (pp. 149-181). The uniforms of the Aunts simultaneously annul

individuality and establish authority, demonstrating the hybrid agency of the women who embody the very system oppressing them.

The catechetical training of Agnes is yet another depiction of technofeminist understanding. She recalls, "*We learned to chant the hymns until they were part of our breathing*" (Atwood, 2019, p. 121). The rituals are cultural software of the self, inculcating obedience to the patriarchal structure by repetition. Gill (2007) also notes that postfeminist culture replicates gender norms through scripted performances, and Banet-Weiser, Gill, and Rottenberg (2020) also emphasize the process of neoliberal feminism borrowing feminist language as the norm. This experience of Agnes also echoes these criticisms: what is being presented as moral education is actually a technological trace of submission.

But Atwood demonstrates that these patriarchal technologies are never entirely sealed systems. The archives of Aunt Lydia, Agnes's reinterpretation of catechism, and Nicole's manipulation of identity documents illustrate Haraway's argument that cyborgian subjects can manipulate technologies. Therefore, *The Testaments* also introduces artefacts not as background information but as challenged infrastructures in which domination and resistance co-exist.

Surveillance and disciplinary power refer to the obligation to wield governmental authority over citizens' operations to deter criminal and deviant behaviors (Graham, 1998). Surveillance and disciplinary power refer to the requirement for governmental jurisdiction over citizens' activities, aimed at discouraging crime and deviance (Graham, 1998).

4.2 Surveillance and Disciplinary Power.

In *The Testaments*, surveillance functions as both spectacle and routine, generating subjects who internalize control. Foucault explains panopticism as a system where visibility is a trap in Discipline and Punish (1977), which provides visible bodies in a system of constant observation. In Atwood, this reasoning is dramatized in her narrative by means of public ceremonies, staged confessions, and the bureaucratic archive. Agnes recalls witnessing punishment rituals: "*We had to watch the women being paraded before us, their heads bent, their sins read aloud. It was meant to instruct us in obedience*" (Atwood, 2019, p. 137). Not only are these rituals punitive, but they are pedagogical, and they train young women to practice self-surveillance by compelling them to become the object of the gaze of the regime.

David Lyon (2007) points out that surveillance is inherent in day-to-day institutions as opposed to prisons or states. Training of the Aunts at Ardua Hall in Gilead is

characteristic of this kind of everyday surveillance: it is gradual, graded, and rectified; learning turns into a form of punishment. Aunt Lydia admits the effectiveness of this regime: "*The best surveillance is always the one that makes the watched believe it is for their own good*" (Atwood, 2019, p. 214). Her quote embodies the Foucaultian idea that power is most effective in being internalized in the form of care, morality, or duty.

Atwood also brings out textual surveillance. The identity is ice-creamed into bureaucratic categories in genealogical registries and witness statements. Lydia reflects on the archive she curates: "*Every secret stored, every whisper recorded—paper is patient, it never forgets*" (Atwood, 2019, p. 243). In this case, documentation is also a tool of surveillance, and memory is transformed into an irreversible machine of discipline. However, the duplicate records that enforce power can be turned against the establishment when Lydia employs her archive to expose corruption, which epitomizes the irony that surveillance structures can be turned against the establishment.

This duality is confirmed by recent criticism. Atwood terms her dystopias as ritualized theatres of surveillance (Howells and York 2023), and Wrobel (2023) places *The Testaments* in the context of the rest of Atwood's work as a step from spectacular violence to institutionalized normalization. Put together, these views support the verdict that the surveillance in the novel is multilayered, visual, textual, and affective, and that resistance is possible by reformulating it internally in opposition to escaping it.

4.3 Biopolitics and Patriarchal Technologies

Reproductive administration in *The Testaments* is the core of Gilead politics: the epitome of what Foucault (1978) calls biopolitics, in which power seizes control of life by controlling fertility, sexuality, and kinship. Women's bodies are less regarded as belonging to individuals and more as belonging to the state that should be catalogued, monitored, and disciplined. Agnes reflects on her own upbringing: "*Every lesson reminded us that our wombs did not belong to us, they belonged to Gilead*" (Atwood, 2019, p. 159). Such a declaration is a summary of the manner in which individual biological potential is swallowed into theocratic rule.

Genealogical registries also depict such logic. Aunt Lydia notes, "*Without the purity of bloodlines, the nation would crumble; every birth must be recorded, every parentage verified*" (Atwood, 2019, p. 268). Biopolitical technologies such as these transform reproduction into a political state-survival issue. The model of patriarchy as a system by Walby (1990) that involves the household, state, and religion can be used to explain the linking of the domestic sphere to institutional control.

In Atwood, the medicalization of reproduction is also dramatized. The organization of fertility tests, arranged marriage, and childbearing rituals is presented as sacred responsibilities, yet they are discourses of guardianship and authority. Bodies, as Braidotti (2013) claims, are never disconnected, and in Gilead, the womb is the place of convergence of theology, medicine, and bureaucracy.

The novel also compares the ritualized control of Gilead to more modern types of data-driven governance. Nicole's storyline in Canada highlights border surveillance and identity documentation: "*Every checkpoint demanded proof of who I was; every paper held the power to erase me*" (Atwood, 2019, p. 322). This reminds me of the analysis by Zuboff (2019) of surveillance capitalism, in which life becomes a data trace and identity is constantly verified. In this manner, Atwood associates theocratic reproduction with digital securitization, claiming that technologies related to patriarchy are adjusted to fit various contexts but seek the same aim, i.e., control over life.

Finally, *The Testaments* shows that biopolitics cannot be discussed out of the context of patriarchal technologies. This reproduction reduction to a political economy of reproduction and of lineage and purity makes the regime a perfect example of Foucault (1978), who states that the present-day power is exercised by life itself. However, according to the archive of Aunt Lydia, the very structures that are supposed to sustain power retain the seeds of their defiance: even the papers that are meant to secure the power become the tools of its revelation.

4.4 Synthesis and Contribution

The three strands of analysis, technofeminism, surveillance, and biopolitics, converge on a central point: *The Testaments* by Atwood presents the technologies of patriarchy not as a background detail but as infrastructures that oppress and liberate at the same time. These uniforms, catechisms, registries, and medico-legal rituals explain why Wajcman (2004) treats technologies as gendered artefacts that reproduce androcentric priorities (pp. 48-50). Simultaneously, the vision of cyborgian hybridity displayed by Haraway (1991) can be traced in the figures of characters like Aunt Lydia, who uses bureaucratic papers to defy the same system she represents. The theorized Foucault (1977) and Lyon (2007) concept of surveillance reveals itself in the novel in spectacle and routine: disciplinary regimes that produce docile subjects. But the novel shows that in such structures, archives and documents can turn into a weapon of disclosure. And lastly, the biopolitical logic outlined by Foucault (1978), further elaborated by Walby (1990) and Braidotti (2013), explains the role of reproductive governance in the core of

the Gilead order, and the experiences of Nicole beyond Gilead reveal similarities with the data-driven surveillance capitalism described by Zuboff (2019).

Have the research objectives been achieved? Yes. The former aimed to discuss the patriarchal technologies in *The Testaments* as those of surveillance and normalization. It has done this by showing how artefacts are used as social technological systems that discipline the bodies, as well as standardizing behavior. The second aim was to explore how feminist agency is created out of such infrastructures. This has also been satisfied as seen in the subversive use of archives by Aunt Lydia, the reinterpretation of catechisms by Agnes and the manipulation of identity documents by Nicole.

Has the research question been answered? The guiding question, How does Atwood's novel depict patriarchal technologies, and what forms of feminist resistance emerge from them?, has been directly addressed. The analysis shows that patriarchal technologies in the novel operate as double-edged instruments: designed to entrench control but also providing opportunities for strategic resistance.

What is the contribution to knowledge? This paper develops an infrastructural feminist interpretation of *The Testaments*. As opposed to the focus on morality, complicity, or gender performance common in previous scholarship (Keck, 2022; Weiss, 2023), this article brings in the concepts of technofeminism, surveillance studies, and biopolitics to rethink artefacts in terms of technologies of governance. This synthesis serves to add to the scholarship of Atwood and also to the feminist theory and surveillance studies overall in that it illuminates the infrastructural aspect of patriarchal power, as well as adding to the feminist theory and surveillance studies as a whole by demonstrating how dystopian fiction serves as a conceptual laboratory in exploring the contact point between gender, technology, and control.

The prospective further directions could be the comparative study with other more modern novels that deal with technological control of life, including Ishiguro's *Klara and the Sun* (2021) or McEwan's *Machines Like Me* (2019). Interdisciplinary studies that integrate literary criticism, bioethics, and digital humanities can elucidate how speculative fiction contributes to pressing discussions of gender, power, and technology.

V. CONCLUSION, CONTRIBUTIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The analysis of *The Testaments* reveals that the sequel to *The Handmaid Tale* by Margaret Atwood transcends a

story about dystopian control; it is a narrative that explores how patriarchal authority is deeply embedded in technological, surveillance, and reproductive technology infrastructures. The results revealed that uniforms, catechisms, genealogical registries, and medico-legal protocols are not random elements but patriarchal technologies that aim at disciplining bodies, regulating reproduction, and normalizing obedience. Concurrently, these infrastructures are described as ambivalent, wherein opportunities to agency and resistance arise when strategically repurposed by women. This is the contradiction between this duality, control, and subversion existing in the same systems, which constitutes the main view of the study.

Theoretically, the work combined the concepts of technofeminism, surveillance studies, and biopolitics to arrive at what can be termed an infrastructural feminist interpretation of the novel by Atwood. This integration enabled the shift in the analysis beyond moral or ethical interpretations of complicity and resistance that have dominated the recent scholarship (Keck, 2022; Weiss, 2023), and emphasizes the socio-technical aspect of power. The analysis of rituals, documents, and artefacts as technologies has helped better understand the conceptualization of patriarchal domination in dystopian fiction. Not only does this enrich Atwood studies, but it also contributes to feminist theory and surveillance studies, demonstrating that literature serves as a conceptual laboratory for theorizing gendered power.

5.1. Contributions to Knowledge.

The study has three primary contributions. First, it adds to the body of Atwood scholarship by reconsidering *The Testaments* as an infrastructural object, highlighting the way artefacts themselves extend their architectural powers as patriarchal technologies. Second, it develops the feminist theory by demonstrating how technofeminist ideas of gendered technologies can be applied to non-digital artefacts, illustrating that patriarchal power is exerted through uniforms and hymnals as much as through algorithms or platforms. Third, it adds to the surveillance and biopolitical research because it demonstrates how reproductive governance in fiction echoes modern-day arguments about data, borders, and identity. Nicole also shows what life is like in Gilead. Still, the moments when she meets with her friends outside of Gilead form a transition of a narrative between theocratic biopolitics and digital surveillance capitalism (Zuboff, 2019), and highlight the flexibility of patriarchal technologies in various contexts.

5.2. Practical Recommendations.

The study is principally literary, but it has other implications besides literary criticism. Policymakers and feminist activists can use the narrative by Atwood to understand how control usually runs not only through direct violence but also through commonplace objects and the machineries of the bureaucratized. Appreciation of the socio-technical aspect of power can assist in the formulation of interventions that can address the infrastructures of inequality, and not merely the symptoms. Teachers, in their turn, may include *The Testaments* in gender and technology-related courses, where they may use the novel to show how texts of literature may be used to model critical thinking on power, surveillance, and resistance.

Ultimately, *The Testaments* illustrates that patriarchal technologies are not monolithic instruments of domination but contested infrastructures where agency and resistance emerge. Through the incorporation of technofeminism, surveillance studies, and biopolitics, this study has demonstrated that artefacts, rituals, and documents are central to how Gilead regulates life and that these spaces are the means of feminist subversion. The novel is therefore another good reminder that technologies of control can never be completely safe: the same databases, uniforms, and catalogues that can cement the place of power can also be re-programmed into the forces of resistance. By pointing out this paradox, the research will advance the current scholarly discussions on gender, technology, and power and will pave the way for future interdisciplinary investigations.

REFERENCES

- [1] Atwood, M. (2019). *The Testaments*. Nan A. Talese/Doubleday.
- [2] Banet-Weiser, S., Gill, R., & Rottenberg, C. (2020). Postfeminism, popular feminism, and neoliberal feminism? *Feminist Theory*, 21(1), 3–24.
- [3] Barry, P. (2017). *Beginning Theory: An Introduction to Literary and Cultural Theory* (4th ed.). Manchester University Press.
- [4] Begum, K. F. (2024). Ecofeminist activism as depicted through Margaret Atwood's *The Testaments*. *International Journal of Scientific Research in Science and Technology*, 11(21), 36–41.
- [5] Braidotti, R. (2013). *The Posthuman*. Polity Press.
- [6] Creswell, J. W., & Creswell, J. D. (2018). *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches* (5th ed.). Sage.
- [7] Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (2018). *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research* (5th ed.). Sage.
- [8] Eagleton, T. (2008). *Literary Theory: An Introduction* (Anniversary ed.). University of Minnesota Press.

- [9] Farhan, R N. (2024). Male Domination of Feminine Identity in a Patriarchal Culture Through Doris Lessing's *The Grass Is Singing*, *Journal of Studies in Humanities and Educational Science*, 4(4), 94-106.
- [10] Farhan, R. N (2025). Postcolonial Feminism, Subaltern Voices, and Literary Resistance in Azar Nafisi's *Reading Lolita in Tehran*, *International Journal of Language, Literature and Culture (IJLLC)*, 5(4),87-99. <https://dx.doi.org/10.22161/ijllc.5.4.13>
- [11] Farhan, R. N. (2023). Oppression in Puritan culture towards female identity with a particular reference to Nathaniel Hawthorne's "The Scarlet Letter", *Journal of Sustainable Studies Refereed Academic Journal*, 5(4)128-138.
- [12] Foucault, M. (1977). *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (A. Sheridan, Trans.) Vintage Books.
- [13] Foucault, M. (1978). *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1: An Introduction* (R. Hurley, Trans.). Vintage Books.
- [14] Gill, R. (2007). Postfeminist media culture: Elements of a sensibility. *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, 10(2), 147–166.
- [15] Graham, S. (1998). The end of geography or the explosion of place? Conceptualizing space, place, and information technology. *Progress in human geography*, 22(2), 165-185.
- [16] Haraway, D. (2013). *Simians, cyborgs, and women: The reinvention of nature*. Routledge.
- [17] Howells, C. A., & York, L. (Eds.). (2023). *The Cambridge Companion to Margaret Atwood* (2nd ed.). Cambridge University Press.
- [18] Keck, M. (2022). Women's complicity, resistance, and moral agency: *The Handmaid's Tale* and *The Testaments*. *Gender forum*, 83.
- [19] Lyon, D. (2007). *Surveillance Studies: An Overview*. Polity Press.
- [20] Ryan, G. W., & Bernard, H. R. (2003). Techniques to identify themes. *Field Methods*, 15(1), 85–109.
- [21] Wajcman, J. (2004). *TechnoFeminism*. Polity Press.
- [22] Walby, S. (1990). *Theorizing Patriarchy*. Basil Blackwell.
- [23] Weiss, J. (2023). The gender performances of Margaret Atwood's Aunt Lydia in *The Testaments*. *Journal of Literary Studies*, 39(1), 1–15.
- [24] Wrobel, C. (2023). Gender and surveillance in Margaret Atwood's novels, from *Bodily Harm* (1981) to *The Testaments* (2019). In *Law, Surveillance and the Humanities* (pp. 252–272). Edinburgh University Press.
- [25] Zuboff, S. (2019). *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism: The Fight for a Human Future at the New Frontier of Power*. PublicAffairs.